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SUBJECT: POLITICAL UPDATE: SHAWAYS DOUBTS NON-SHIA
ALLIANCE PM POSSIBLE; SHIA ISLAMISTS CHAFE AT USG CALLS
FOR CROSS-SECTARIANISM

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, reason 1.4 (d)

[11](#). (S) Summary. The Kurds together with the Sunni Arab bloc and Ayad Allawi's group are writing up a program that they can present as a national salvation front program. They aim to attract Shia Islamists who will split from Prime Minister Jafari. Deputy Prime Minister Shaways told PolOffs February 22 that the Shia Coalition's refusal to include Ayad Allawi is the biggest obstacle to forming the new government. He doubted it would be possible for any candidate outside the Shia Coalition to become PM, noting Sistani's insistence on Shia Coalition unity. Shia independent Qassim Daoud asserted to PolOff on February 22 that any attempt to nominate a Prime Minister outside of the Shia Coalition would be the basis for a Shia uprising in Iraq. He did not think loyalty to Jafari was deep, however. Allawi ally Saad al-Janabi told us February 21 that Allawi and Sunni Arab leaders agreed on February 20 to open a dialogue with Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and other Shia leaders. Adil Abd al-Mahdi told the Ambassador February 22 that the Shia Coalition had a good meeting with Sunni Arab Tawaffuq representatives. The Ambassador's remarks at a February 20 press conference drew criticism from many Shia Coalition members while others praised his statements, saying that the Iraqi street agreed with him.

[12](#). (C) Summary Continued. President Talabani will host a midday meeting February 23 with senior political leaders to discuss how to contain the impact of the bombing of the Shrine of the 10th and 11th Imams in Samarra. In response to a reporter's question about whether the Samarra bombing will affect the political dialogue, Abdulaziz Al-Hakim answered, "Dialogues are meant to continue," but later added that "we cannot continue our dialogue in a normal manner while we suffer from this calamity." End Summary.

DRAWING UP A SALVATION FRONT PROGRAM

[13](#). (S) On February 21 and February 22 there were more rounds of meetings about government formation. The Kurdish/Allawi/Sunni Arab group met to begin developing the principles from the meeting a month in Kurdistan into a broader government program. This program would be introduced by the Kurds as the basis of a "National Salvation Front" to which the Shia would be invited to join. There was another, quieter meeting February 21 between Kurdish PUKer Barham Saleh and SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi aimed at developing a

government program to which SCIRI could adhere with the Kurdish-Allawi-Sunni Arab group. It also began discussing the choreography by which SCIRI would drop its support for the Shia Coalition's official prime minister nominee, Ibrahim Jafari. They are reviewing names for Prime Minister such as Qassim Daoud and Finance Minister Ali Allawi. They will develop a longer list of names in the coming days. They have told the Ambassador that they will widen the discussions to include Ibrahim al-Janabi (Allawi aide), Azet Berwari from the KDP, and a representative of the Sunni Arab Islamic Party

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SHAWAYS: SHIA COALITION REFUSAL
TO ACCEPT ALLAWI PRIMARY OBSTACLE TO FORMING GOVT.

14. (C) On February 22, Kurdish Deputy Prime Minister Rowsh Shaways told PolOffs that the primary obstacle to forming a national unity government is the ongoing refusal of the entire Shia Coalition to accept former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and his National Iraqi List as part of the new government. Given Ayatollah Sistani's instructions to both SCIRI's Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and Prime Minister-elect Ibrahim al-Jafari to maintain the unity of the Shia Coalition, Shaways doubted that it would be possible to field an alternate candidate - such as Allawi - for Prime Minister. Should Jafari fail to assemble a government within the thirty-day period specified by the Constitution, however, the Shia would be allowed to select a new candidate. Shaways stated that the candidate must come from within the Shia Coalition and

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ruled out SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi, noting that he would be considered too controversial. Shaways added that the sectarian violence over the Al-Askaria Mosque bombing in Samarra on February 22 would only make government formation more difficult. Iraq, he opined, had begun its slide toward civil war. He confided that he was not sure Sistani could control the Shia street much longer.

SHIA INDEPENDENT QASSIM DAOUD: PM CANDIDATE OUTSIDE
SHIA COALITION IMPOSSIBLE

15. (C) Shia independent Qassim Daoud also informed PolOff on February 22 that any attempt to nominate a Prime Minister outside of the Shia Coalition would provide the basis for a Shia uprising in Iraq. He had also heard rumors that an alternate candidate might be nominated if Prime Minister-elect Jafari failed to convene a government in time. He expressed bitterness at the result of the internal Shia vote on February 12, stating that deciding a nomination by a margin of one vote "is not democracy." Daoud sympathized with the difficulties of working in a Jafari government again after the experiences of this past year. He firmly maintained, however, that only the Shia had the right to select the Prime Minister. As long as the alternate candidate came from within the Shia Coalition, however, Daoud indicated that no one would fight to keep Jafari.

SUNNI ARAB LEADERS TO REACH OUT TO SHIA PARTIES

16. (C) Allawi ally Saad al-Janabi told Poloff February 21 that Allawi hosted a lunch for Sunni Arab leaders on February 20 at which the group decided to open a dialogue with Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and other Shia

leaders. Present were Saleh Mutlak from the Hewan National Dialogue, Khalaf al-Ayyan and Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi from the National Dialogue Council, and Ayad al-Samarrai from the Iraqi Islamic Party. Following the luncheon, Mutlak, who has been elusive in declaring his allegiance to any political block, made a public statement that he (and his coalition) is a member of the Sunni Arab and Allawi negotiating group. Separately, SCIRI's Abd al-Mahdi told the Ambassador February 22 that the Shia Coalition had had a good meeting with the Tawaffuq Front on February 21.

RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR'S FEBRUARY 20 PRESS CONFERENCE

¶7. (C) SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al-Husseini complained to Poloff February 21 about the Ambassador's remarks to the press indicating that the USG might withhold assistance from a new sectarian government. Husseini said that such comments make Iraq look like it has no sovereignty and is a US puppet. According to February 21 press reports, Shia Islamist Abbas al-Bayyati said that the Ambassador's expression of opposition to sectarian Defense and Interior Ministers reflected an international role that is "important, effective and significant" but that should be dealt with based on Iraqi national interests. When PolOff argued the importance of establishing a unity government, al-Husseini said he understood its importance and agreed with SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's comments that everyone needs to be included. But he explained that these press statements make al-Hakim's job harder to convince his Shia base that working closely with the Americans is a good thing.

¶8. (C) In a February 21 meeting with Poloffs, re-elected Council of Representatives (CoR) member Shia Coalition Independent Zakia Ismail Haqqi told PolOffs that she was "dismayed" to read the Ambassador's public statements in support of a national unity government. She alleged that the USG effort ran contrary to a U.S.-Iraqi relationship based on trust and equality. She said that, while Iraqis are grateful for liberating them from Saddam, the Ambassador's statement made her sad because it shows "he disrespects our democracy and is too much in our affairs". She also strongly disagreed with efforts to

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include Dr. Ayad Allawi in the new government, claiming he is a corrupted Baathist. In the Shia Coalition vote on the PM nomination, Haqqi proudly said that she voted for Ibrahim Jafari because of his efforts to fight corruption. She said that during Jafari's tenure, the Commission for Public Integrity brought forward 450 corruption cases for prosecution that included cases against seven ministers.

¶9. (C) Upon hearing about the bombing of the Shrine of the 10th and 11th Imams in Samarra CoR members Jinan Jasim al-Ubaidi and Muna Noor Zalzal al-Ubaidi and Zalzal queried PolOffs as to why the Ambassador continues to push for Sunni inclusion when they are responsible for all the violence. Poloffs responded by saying that inclusion of all groups is important, and that working towards a more stable government is a process that requires time.

¶10. (C) TNA Legal Committee Chairman Muhsin Saadoun (Kurdish Alliance) told PolOffs February 21 that he agreed with the Ambassador's statements, saying the Ambassador had the right to threaten cuts in support since the political parties are talking without caring for the national interests. New Council of

Representatives member Abd al-Lateed Abd al-Wahab al-Bedri (National Iraqi List) told PolOff February 22 that the Ambassador's press conference was "excellent," adding that the street (including the Shia) agrees with him.

SADRIST UPBEAT THAT DEAL ACHIEVABLE

¶11. (C) Leading Sadrism Baha al-Araji told PolOff February 22 that "today was a good day for government formation" because the Sadrists and PM Jafari called for calm, and this was largely eventually achieved. Al-Araji will represent the Sadrists at the February 23 lunch with President Talabani. He said he hopes to build on today's success at quelling the violence after the Samarra mosque bombing.
KHALILZAD